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The Coming Church

The Coming Church

A PLEA FOR
A CHURCH SIMPLY CHRISTIAN

By the

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MOFFITT

To
THE MEMORY OF
JOHN CAIRD
LATE PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF GLASGOW

"He belonged to and lived for the Church catholic."

Note

THIS little book is the expansion of an address first delivered to the Theological Society of the University of Glasgow, and afterwards to the (English) Churchmen's Union. The substance of it has also been preached as discourses to congregations in London, Nottingham, and Glasgow.

Jesus will always supply us with the best criticism of Christianity.

F. H. AMIEL.

Christianity has been tried for more than eighteen centuries ; it is about time to try the religion of Jesus.

DEAN MILMAN.

Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,
If I should choose to cry, as now, "Shares!"—
See if the best of you bars me my ration!
Because I prefer for my expounder
Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder.

ROBERT BROWNING.

We read in our books of a too nice *Athenian*, being entertained in a Place by one given to Hospitality, finding anon that another was received with the like courtesie, and then a third, growing very angry, "I thought," said he, "that I had found here a *Friends House*, but I find I am fallen into an *Inne* to entertain all comers, rather than a lodging for some private and especial Friends."

Let it not offend any that I have made Christianity rather an *Inne* to receive all, than a private house to receive some few.

JOHN HALES, of Eton, 1642.

If Christ were just now in the world, which Church would be His? I shall not venture to say the United Presbyterian. We are not pure and broad enough to hold Him. But as little would I say any other. Because of our narrowness and contentions He would belong particularly to none of us, and will remain away till He can make a Church in some degree like Himself. Meantime, He belongs to all who welcome His spirit.

Dr JOHN KER.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church Universal, the Communion of holy people.



The Coming Church

"Is Christ divided?"—ST PAUL.

I

THE CHURCH IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

THE word "Church" has so often and so much been the symbol, not of union, but of disunion, that we need again and again to turn aside from the thoughts and ways of men to study the story of the divine charity in the Gospels, and by that study to revive our fading ideal of what ought to be the spirit, aims, and methods of a Church that is at all worthy to be called a Christ's Church. Indeed, one of the characteristic tendencies of our religious times, that represented by the phrase "Back to Jesus," indicates, I believe, the best and most direct way out of not a few of our

ecclesiastical troubles and confusions. A return to "the simplicity that is toward Christ," to "the truth as it is in Jesus," would, if honestly and earnestly attempted, put an end to much sectarian strife by abolishing that upon which sectarianism rests, bring about a reformation such as has never been known in the history of our religion, and be the signal for a new and wonderful advance.¹

However carelessly or conventionally we may choose to read the Gospels, we cannot, I am persuaded, fail to be impressed by the fact that the sympathies of Jesus were universal in their range and character—so universal as to be a new and surprising revelation

¹ The cry "Back to Jesus" is not one of retrogression. It is the symbol of a going back which is in reality a going forward. It means back to the simplicity of first principles. The teaching of Jesus is the standard by which everything claiming the Christian name ought to be judged. It is only historically that it can be said to belong to the past. It is still an unexhausted and unrealised ideal. The principles of Jesus are the principles of spiritual freedom and progress.

to the world. Around Him there was much littleness and intolerance, but in His fellowship and in the circle of His influence everything was large and free, and it was impossible for anyone to be really near Him, to be in the communion of His Spirit, and yet to remain narrow and exclusive.

The one supreme feature of His creative mission is its universality. Such utterances as "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," "Yet there is room," "In my Father's house are many mansions," reveal the boundless hospitality of His mind and heart, and put the spirit and purpose of His life into language which all can understand. His gospel is good tidings for all people, and He brings no blessings to the world which cannot be secured through repentance, faith, and obedience by any and every man. In His eyes all men are, if not in character and attainment, yet in idea, capacity, and calling, the sons of God. The divine sonhood of humanity, of which His own Sonhood is

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type, prophecy, and promise, is His distinctive secret and message. Man the son of God is the Christian idea of man, and the rock or foundation upon which Jesus builds His Religion, His Church, His Kingdom.

No! there was nothing exclusive about the One Master of Christians. To men who, on the strength of their pedigree, arrogated to themselves the position of God's favourites, and claimed the heavenly blessings as exclusively their own, He said, "Many shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God." God is the Father of all men, not merely of chosen men. The true succession from Abraham was not hereditary, not a tie of blood or descent, but a moral relationship, a kindred spirit and character. Judea and Judaism were not large enough for Him. Hatred between Jews and Samaritans, differences in Greek, Roman, and Gothic blood, prejudices of race, custom, and creed, were

not to hinder the progress of His order and way of life. His charity embraced all classes and conditions of men ; and most unmistakably His sympathy was with those who were wandering outside the circle of temple and synagogue, strangers and foreigners, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, schismatics and heretics, and all that sort of people. You remember how certain Greeks approaching Him became to His prophetic soul, dreaming of things to come, the symbol and pledge of a whole world opening its doors to receive Him. Not always was He to be a lonely man, the Good Shepherd of a little flock, the Master of a few disciples. In a moment of supreme elevation of soul He felt that He had only to be lifted up, lifted out of and above the mists of local, sectarian, and political passion and prejudice—only to be seen as He was, to draw all men unto Him.

It is clear, I think, beyond all need of proof, that our Lord meant that His followers and friends should come together—be drawn,

that is, into a fellowship, a society, a church. His first message, it is true, was to men as individuals. The principle of individuality may, indeed, be said to have been born into the religious consciousness of mankind with Jesus of Nazareth. He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them ; not to displace and dissipate, but to reinforce personal energy. The value of the individual, the worth of the personal soul, is one of those infinite ideas which breathe through everything Jesus said and did. Under His influence human development tends no longer towards servitude, but towards freedom. He exhorted His disciples to have each his own individual life, heedless of the traditions and commandments of Scribes and Pharisees. The faith He called for and quickened gave men to themselves, and made of them kings and priests unto God. Even in relation to Himself His disciples were to be not His slaves, but His friends—the free children of His Father. But individuality is not isolation. Not in isolation can man

realise himself. He is designed for social relations in his spiritual as in his natural life. Indeed, the more he finds himself, the more he finds his brethren. Alone, he is yet not alone. His personality holds the secret of all social ties. God is the Father of each man and of all mankind. The Christian disciple who has only heard the personal call of the Lord has heard but half of His message. "Together in my name" is also a law of His order and way of life. His redeeming work begins with the single soul, but it does not end there. He meant His religion to become a public expression, and not to remain a merely personal experience. It was not a part of His plan to be a leader of solitary disciples. We cannot keep apart and aloof if we have the affections which He inspires, and the persuasions which He communicates. The tie which relates us to Him also binds us to all His brethren, and gives us a sense of membership in a communion which is beyond all earthly banding

and disbanding. In true fellowship with the Son of Man and the Son of God, we are in fellowship with the whole family of God on earth and in heaven.¹

It is also plain that the full idea and purpose of the Saviour's life could only be realised in and through other lives. It was, indeed, His hope and reliance, amid all the limitations and disappointments of His Palestinian ministry, that the little flock which He had gathered and filled with His own divine trusts and charities would, when He had passed for ever from the ways of earth and time, carry on His work, perpetuate His influence, and be to the end of the age a new and living body for His Spirit. Over Him, death, He was persuaded, could have no dominion. Not only in the unseen world of spirits, but in the experience, character, and work of many men and many generations of

¹ "That was the beginning of a society which could be nothing but universal, because it stood in the name of the Son of God and the Son of man."—*F. D. Maurice.*

men, was He to have a glorious resurrection and a blessed immortality.

But to Jesus His Church was to be no exclusive body. It was to have its limits, but these were to be the natural limits of spiritual affinity and sympathy. He recognised His brethren in all who had a kindred spirit. The only principle of religious union which He acknowledged, and which has been so long and strangely ignored, is contained in the words, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother." His flock is truly and deeply one wherever it is scattered, but the folds are many. It was to the church of His own country and day, thinking that its fold was the sole or particular care of God, He addressed the immortal message: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must lead; and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Again and again He rebuked His disciples for their narrowness and intolerance. "Ye know

not what spirit ye are of." No one ought to be an outsider to them who is not an outsider to Him. Demonstrations of loyalty on the part of any disciples to show that they were more on His side than certain others, gave no pleasure to their Master. They were to welcome the most imperfect faith, the feeblest love, the most partial allegiance, and to count as friends all who were living and working in His spirit. "Forbid him not, because he followeth not with us. Whosoever is not against me is for me." The doing of good was to Jesus far more than any nominal attachment to His company or cause. All who are "of the truth" He reckoned to be on His side. What has the mark of exclusiveness is indeed as unlike Jesus as what has the mark of sinful passion. To be exclusive is the mark of a Pharisee, not of a disciple of Him who never repulsed any sincere and seeking soul, but had a welcome for all. The wheat and the tares of His parable are not men and women, but good and evil, truth and error; and in the

Master's judgment they are too closely and subtly intermingled both in societies and in individuals for any sharp division to be made, or for any harsh or hasty methods of action to be followed, or for any separation other than that unerring and divine one which time slowly makes and declares. The intolerance of superior goodness, or superior orthodoxy, finds no favour in the sight of Him who is at once both the Judge and the Saviour of men. "Not so ; lest in pulling up the tares ye root up the wheat also."

A very simple thing was the Church of Jesus at the beginning—a simple social life in spiritual things. It is only by a prosaic interpretation of His poetic speech that it is possible to get ecclesiastical meanings out of any of His sayings. There was nothing "ecclesiastical" about Him. The kingdom, or order of God upon the earth, and not the Church, was the central idea of His teaching. The Church in the nature of things was bound to come, but we are far away from the mind of Christ when

we think of it as an institution made after the law of a carnal commandment, an organised religious society built up according to specific directions, imposed by outward pressure, and having a clear and definite position above or by the side of civil institutions. A highly organised body or corporation, with orders, articles, rubrics, ritual, and discipline, was perhaps inevitable in the development of Christianity; but any particular form of organisation cannot truly be regarded as of the essence of the Church of Christ. Historical and textual criticism is making it more and more certain that Jesus did not institute a Church in the traditional or popular sense of the word, and a criticism which is not of the letter but of the spirit confirms it. Christ is the end, not only of the Jewish law but of everything akin to it. The age of Christ is the age of the Spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. In no study is the aid of a reverent and cultured imagination more necessary than in that of the New Testa-

ment literature. "Men," said Archbishop Whately, "have often built upon one or two passages of Scripture an ingenious and consistent scheme of which the greater part is a tissue of their own reasonings and conjectures." Two or three texts of doubtful authenticity or of doubtful interpretation form the whole foundation of the vast structure of ecclesiasticism. The real exegesis of the Gospels, however, is not outward and textual, but intrinsic and spiritual. Particular and special words attributed to Jesus are to be tested and understood by the principles and spirit of His whole teaching. So read and studied, it is difficult to get out of the Gospels any other conception of the Church than that of a company of disciples gathered together in the name of their Master and in sympathy with His spirit and purpose — a society of souls committed to the filial and fraternal life of which He is the representative, and to which He leads all who are led by Him. His first ministers were sent

forth unburdened by rules and forms. Their Master's yoke was easy and His burden light. For prescriptions He gave principles, and for outward authority an indwelling spirit. The priesthood of Christ is the natural priesthood of spiritual power and character. In idea every Christian man is a priest unto God, an evangelist, a missionary, a minister. Great human necessities required in course of time such an institution as the Christian ministry in the forms we know it; yet it was to the whole body of His friends Jesus committed His cause, and the gifts He gave to men knew no restrictions save those of character.¹ By the power of the keys He meant the power of knowledge to impart knowledge, of faith to quicken faith, of reverence to evoke reverence,

¹ "Wherever two or three are gathered together in a common love and faith, there will be a Christian Church. For years such a society existed without a separate order of clergy. All were alike holy, all were alike consecrated. The clergy arose gradually out of pre-existing institutions, or under the pressure of local emergencies—to meet the necessary needs of the Christian community."
—*Dean Stanley.*

of love to kindle love, of goodness to spread goodness. "Jesus," said the French theologian Vinet, "instituted little but inspired much." Baptism was familiar to the Jews long before it became the initiatory rite of Christian discipleship. In its original idea and form the Holy Supper of Christendom was no ecclesiastical or mystical rite, but a social meal; and its institution was so perfectly in keeping with the thought and feeling of the hour, and so much the giving of a new and deeper significance to an existing ceremony, that it can hardly be designated an institution. Although more binding than any formal commandment, yet the wish of a breaking heart, the simple and tender suggestion of dying love, can no more be called a commandment than can that utterance of profound emotion, "It is my body," "It is my blood," in presence of the broken bread and outpoured wine of the Paschal Supper—which brought before His sensitive mind the thought and manner of His approaching death—be discharged of all

its metaphorical significance, and be fairly used as a proof-text of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Religion and the Church require their symbolic observances, but to Jesus no material rites were essential, and not by Him were they made conditions of communion or the sole channel of any spiritual blessing. The prodigal son may arise and go to his father and be duly received, without taking the hand of a priest. The cry of penitence does not need the charm of an enacted ceremony to make it efficacious. All the divinest blessings, as the Beatitudes so clearly show, Jesus made dependent, not on anything outward and formal, but on inward disposition and character. It was to humility, to the merciful and quiet spirit, to purity of heart, to faith, obedience and love, He promised the strength and peace of God, the beatific vision and communion.

And in the sense in which we use the word, Jesus laid down no creed. In the Gospels we have the Lord's Prayer, but not the Lord's Creed—unless we regard as such

the Beatitudes, and they are a creed of life, not a creed of speculation. Authoritative statements of historical and theological beliefs necessary to "salvation" belong to an age much later than that of Jesus. To nothing did He seem more indifferent than to theory and opinion. Even differences of opinion concerning Himself were no barrier to His sympathy. Saying "Lord, Lord," raised no one in His regard. For verbal and other formal honours He cared nothing. He cared chiefly that the Spirit of the Son—the spirit of filial trust and obedience, love and sacrifice—should be in men and prevail. The faith which He regarded as essential to discipleship is something quite distinct from speculative and critical theories; it is not a correct opinion, an assent to propositions; it is more akin to what we mean by fidelity—a moral temper, a spiritual affection, the surrender of the heart, the submission of the will, the devotion of the life to God.

The Jesus of the Gospels never presented

Himself to men as a difficult problem, a vast and bewildering puzzle they had to solve; but as Light, and Guide, and Way. The Messianic controversy in which He was involved was not a personal but a national and historical controversy. "What think ye of the Christ?" was a question that had reference to the Messianic ideal of His nation and age, and not to His own person or place in the universe—a political, not a theological question. What has been called His "boundless self-assertion" is rather (even in the least historical of the four Gospels) the absolute and exultant identification of Himself with His Father's will and work, and with His own spirit and way of life. It was no narrow personal loyalty which He craved and sought. He did not come to assert Himself, but to make His Father known. To honour the Father was to honour the Son, and to do the Father's will was, with Him who did that perfect will perfectly, far more than any merely private

or public attachment to His own company. Extremely patient He ever was toward all ignorant and erroneous estimates of His person and work. It was the denial of the presence of the spirit of goodness and mercy in His works of healing, and not words spoken against the Son of Man: it was bigotry and inhumanity—which called forth that terrible saying concerning the sin that was unpardonable both in that age and in the age to come. All beneficence of life ever won His sympathetic regard. In the parable of the sheep and the goats how finely He taught the lesson which we have so long and sadly missed—that the service of man is His service. The judgment of which it speaks knows nothing of creed, or ritual, or emotional experience, or pietistic test: not a word is spoken which the ecclesiastic, the theologian, or the evangelist can in any way appropriate—not a word which is not purely and strictly human. Men are accepted or rejected according as they have loved and

served their needy fellows, or have not loved and served them. The followers Jesus wanted in Galilee and Judea were not a procession of ritualists or dogmatists, and still less a crowd of pious self-seekers, anxious to make the best in a poor way of both worlds; but men and women who loved His character and the things for which He stood, who were in practical sympathy with His devotion to the will of God and to the uplifting and redemption of mankind, and who called nothing their own, whether it was genius or talent, or time or money, or health or life. The Church He seeks to gather is made up of those who are quickened and possessed by His filial and fraternal spirit—inspired with His own passion for God and humanity. It is called out of the world, not to condemn the world, but to save it. It is not the Kingdom, but it exists to help to make the Kingdom come. Its field is the world—the purification and elevation of the whole life of man, and its end, a civilisation truly and completely Christian.

II

THE CHURCH OF JESUS AN UNREALISED IDEAL

THE interpretation of the mind, spirit, and purpose of Jesus I have thus given, leads me on to say that the Church of Jesus has never yet been approximately realised according to its idea. It is not a thing which has been seen, or which can be seen now. The One, Holy, Catholic Church of Christ is, and has always been, a faith and a hope, not a visible, but an ideal fact.

It is certainly not a miraculously constituted and complete body of which we catch glimpses in the writings of the first Christian teachers, but an ideal society which is only beginning to find more or less rude and inadequate expression in scattered communities in Asia

Minor and elsewhere, and adjusting itself to the varying circumstances of locality, race, temperament, custom, and emergency. The signs of transition from Judaism and Paganism we find everywhere, in the customs and rites, and in the theological forms and symbols, of the primitive Christian congregations. The Book of the Acts exhibits the first Church at Jerusalem as little more than a Jewish assembly, adhering to the symbolical and local forms of the Jewish religion, and differing from their fellow-countrymen only in believing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised to the fathers. The Epistles to the Thessalonians exhibit men not organising institutions which are to last for all time, but neglecting even ordinary business in their preparation for Messiah's advent in the clouds of heaven. It is idle, as the late Master of Balliol says in his Commentary, to seek for an organised church in such a provisional company waiting to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The Epistles to the

Corinthians speak of grave immoralities, of a perilous observance of idolatrous customs, of sharply defined parties, of sectarian developments and divisions, which drew forth much sorrowful rebuke from St Paul. The Epistle to the Galatians shows the Jewish and Gentile forms of mind looking upon the religion of Jesus from very different standpoints, and the two views in bitter conflict threatening destruction to each other. Important and fascinating though the study may be of the beginnings of Christianity as a social enthusiasm and organised force, yet it is difficult to trace in these first rudiments of Christian brotherhood and these first sketches of Christian doctrine and discipline, any adequate outline of the ideal of the Christian religion and the Christian Church.

But if for precedents we must go back to apostolic times, let it be to study the ecclesiastical ideas and activities of the man who wrote, "The Jerusalem which is above is free, the mother of us all," and from whom the

Christian movement took a new departure and a broader way. It is true we must ever interpret Paul by Jesus, and not Jesus by Paul; yet in claiming for the religion and Church of Christ the largest and most spiritual relations to humanity, the apostle was an unerring interpreter of the mind of his Master; and in his lifelong struggle to emancipate Christianity from Jewish law and custom, and to make of it a movement pressing and passing out of Judaism to the wide world, he was filling up that which was behind of the Saviour's Passion and Sacrifice. Like every great teacher, St Paul was at heart an idealist. By "the Jerusalem which is above" he meant the ideal of the Christian communion. To him the religion of Christ was an unbound word, and the Church of Christ a free, spiritual, indivisible, universal society, "the blessed company of all faithful souls."

It was the saying of one who had long meditated upon the follies and fanaticisms of mankind,—“Save me from the sorrow of the

founders of religions, the sorrow of seeing great ideas perverted, and great purposes made ridiculous." The ideal of the Church of Jesus was not realised in the apostolic age, nor has it been realised in the ecclesiastical organisations of any age since. The Church, as history knows it, has been called "the bane of Christianity," and there is only too much evidence to support that pessimistic view. In some of its aspects it looks anything but a divine institution. "The history of the Church," said the late Dean Alford, "is often nothing more than the history of the world's hatreds more embittered, of the world's pride made prouder still." Its records are painful reading, saddening to the wise, and simply bewildering to the less wise. The visible representative of Christ often misrepresents Him. Considered in the light of what Jesus said and did, it is impossible to regard much of what is called church history as other than caricature. It is not the religion of Jesus which we see, but the old Jewish for-

malisms and pagan superstitions wearing the Christian name. It is not the ideas and spirit of Jesus with which we are made familiar, but the principles and passions which once crucified Him again putting Him to an open shame. The moral and spiritual elements of Christianity, if not entirely obscured, hold only a subordinate place; organisation, sacrament, and creed are everywhere supreme. The woes which Jesus spoke of as the inevitable penalty of the wrong life are proclaimed against dissent from this or that metaphysical hypothesis concerning the mystery of the Divine nature and manifestation. Not immorality, not spiritual ignorance and indifference, but heresy and schism are the evils against which the Church throws her whole strength. It is not spiritual but dogmatic agreement that is insisted upon, and a logical flaw in the presentation of unsearchable mysteries is deemed a more fatal fault than even theft, adultery, or murder.

The visible triumphs of Christianity have

seldom been its true successes. The Christian student, eager to trace the moral and spiritual influence of his religion during the centuries, has to do it chiefly through the silent spread of its ideas and spirit, rather than through its agencies and operations as an organised force. What are described as the victories of Christianity over heathenism and heresy, are often nothing more than the victories of an intolerant and worldly sect. The despised heresy often holds a larger truth than the doctrine recognised as "orthodox." It is outside the ecclesiastical camp as often as within it that we discover the true Christian succession—the succession of Christ. The notes of the true Church are with the banished ones rather than with their persecutors and judges—often more visible in the fugitive companies accustomed to meet in upper rooms and in caves and dens of the earth, than in the dominant parties or famous councils of ecclesiastical history. In every age from the beginning until now those who have most

faithfully sought to recover and realise the religion of Jesus have been invariably forced—often much against their will—into an attitude of Protestantism or Nonconformity,—forced, as the late Dr A. B. Bruce once expressed it, to be anti-ecclesiastical in order not to be anti-Christian. The continuity of the Church of Christ is a sublime reality; it is not, however, anything outward and formal, but a vital and sympathetic relation to the Christian life of former ages. God may be our Father and Redeemer, though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledge us not. To be suspected or disowned by ecclesiastical Christianity is after all a small matter. Its own history is largely a suppression of the principle of personal faith and obedience which was so fundamental in the teaching of our Lord. Long before the time of the Reformation it had come to take its stand upon the opposite principle of corporate responsibility, and to maintain that it is not Christians who make the Church, but the Church which

makes Christians, and that justification is first of the community, then of the individual. What Cardinal Newman called the doctrine of development in religion may be frankly admitted ; we are committed in Christ's name to an undeparting inspiration and to a progressive revelation ; but the developments of Christianity unfortunately have seldom been normal, and have often failed to preserve the original ideas.

Speaking from the side of a purely intellectual culture, Goethe maintained that the Teutonic revolt against Rome threw back the progress of mankind for centuries. From this point of view it was unquestionably not all pure gain—though the debt of European civilisation to Luther's principle and spirit is still largely unacknowledged. It was as the representative of religion and the Church that Dr Newman described the Reformation as “a grand catastrophe.” There is much, no doubt, especially in the later history of Protestantism, which appears

to justify that attitude. The Reformation was won at a great cost. It not only left venerable cathedrals and abbeys disfigured and broken, but the spiritual temple of which these were the visible signs and symbols also suffered. The reaction left many embracing a half truth concerning religion as if it were the whole truth, and almost unable to believe in any Christian Church at all. The revived sense of individualism which the Reformation largely effected, led to an exaggerated individualism which well-nigh banished the sense and need of religious fellowship, and to separation from inherited ways of worship and discipline which embodied a vast deal of wisdom, and left men much poorer for the loss. It is difficult, however, for the most dispassionate mind to see how there could have been any other way of escape from the distresses of medieval Christendom than the way of revolt and revolution, or how a Church freer, purer, and more catholic, could have been evolved gradually and peacefully from the old Church.

While the Reformation was not the unalloyed blessing which many Protestants believe it to have been, it was an onward and not a backward step in the march of Christian progress. The possession of freedom and room for the exercise of all the rights of Christian personality are necessary to any worthy realisation of Christ's ideal of His Church. The truly Catholic Church, when it comes, will be a union of souls all the more intimate for their development of personal integrity and strength. Many of the first-fruits of spiritual liberty have been bitter, but its second growth will be for the healing of the nations. It was finely said of Luther that he found a united church and a dead church, and he left a divided church and a living church. And this is about the only thing which can be said in justification of Protestant divisions, that they are better than a mechanical uniformity due to superstition, to stagnation of thought, or indifference; and that they prepare the way for a truer, more spiritual, more comprehensive Christian

fellowship than any of which Pope or Council ever dreamed.

The conception of religious progress, like that of every other kind of progress, must leave room for much apparent immobility, stagnation, and even retrogression. Often we must look largely at things to see anything like progress. Our doubts and distrusts vanish only as we cast our eyes backward over far and wide spaces. The centuries reveal what the passing days and years conceal. After the Reformation it was supposed by many that Protestantism, as Luther, Knox, and Henry VIII. left it, was the final stage and form of the institutional life of the Christian religion. In this way it became virtually another Papacy, with many Popes instead of one. So, too, it soon came to adopt in all its divisions and sects arbitrary rules and methods which were much of the same character as the old ecclesiastical tyrannies. The Church relation was still an outward domination, not an inward and fraternal fellowship; a despotic, not a free,

spiritual unity. Boundaries were fixed which only the sincerest and bravest ever ventured to disregard. Penalties changed their shape but not their substance. Heresy charges and trials, expulsions, depositions, suspicions, social ostracism, took the place of the thumbscrew, the gibbet, and the pyre. It was only a partial Reformation.

The early Independents were among the first to bear witness against the finality which was the avowed principle of the Reformed churches. The last charge of John Robinson of Leyden, the father of English Independency, to the members of his church on the eve of their emigration, in 1620, to the New World, scattered the first seed of an advancing Protestantism. In it he declared that the Reformed churches of his day were in a miserably backward condition. The Lutherans, he said, were where Luther had left them, and the Calvinists had stuck fast at the place to which they had been led by Calvin. "But I charge you that you follow me no farther than I

follow Jesus Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be ready to receive it. For I am verily persuaded that the Lord hath more truth to break out of His Holy Word." The terms "Dissent" and "Nonconformity," like Protestantism, define unfortunately by negation that which, in the beginning at least, was strongly affirmative in its idea and spirit. The real strength of the position of Independents like Robinson was not in what they stood against, but in what they stood for. They came down upon the platform of Separatism and Dissent from the high and pure region of loyalty to Christ, and their Independency, though ardent and intense, was eminently Catholic. In aspiration and aim they claimed the universal fellowship of the Church of Christ. Catholic they were bound to be by the very position of greater nearness to the universal Christ which they professed to take; and it was in the interests of a Christian catholicity they sought to do their special work. They formed what are

now described as Free Churches ; but by Free Churches much more was meant than freedom from the Papal yoke, or from any ecclesiastical relation to the State : they meant churches so related to one another and to their own past and present as to have full room and free course for following the mind and spirit of the one Master.¹ Loyal to Christ, they felt that they and their churches must be at once both stable and progressive. They did not need any other security of order or stimulus to

¹ The reader must not confound the old Independency with the new Congregationalism which seeks to be a large and aggressive denomination. The writer has always maintained that the denominational idea has no place in Independency, and prefers to describe his own ecclesiastical position as that of an Independent Christian minister—in sympathy more or less with churches of every name, but formally related to none.

“ It is because Independency is not a Church system that I cleave to it. A company of men and women meeting for religious worship, teaching, and work is not a sect. Any number of such companies meeting for brotherly counsel and co-operation is not a sect. It is the simplest form of church organisation in which the Christian life can nourish itself and act on society.”—*James Baldwin Brown*.

progress than that contained in their simple and unreserved Christian loyalty. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty—and the safeguard of liberty.

The late Matthew Arnold was fond of rebuking English Dissenters for breaking with what he called "the Church," but the reasons which compelled and still compel many to be Dissenters are in substance the same which compelled many in the sixteenth century to be Protestants, namely, the right and duty of Christian men to regulate their ecclesiastical connections by the mind of Christ and the teaching of His Spirit.¹ In England many are Dissenters, not for the sake of dissent, and not because they think that (in the present mixed state of things) Parliament is more likely to be misled in dealing with ecclesiastical and religious affairs than assemblies of worldly-minded clerics, or small communities

¹ "He makes the separation who gives the first just cause of it, not he that makes an actual separation upon a just cause preceding."—*Archbishop Laud*.

of narrow-minded religious laymen; but because the Anglican Church, though in some respects the freest and most comprehensive Church in Christendom, is not free and comprehensive enough. They are not able to pass through its gates in an upright attitude, and they cannot crouch and creep. It is their loyalty to the ideal of the Church of Christ and their obedience to the inward light which keep them outside, and make of them dwellers in tents and pilgrims of the ideal, till the day of a Church truly catholic shall dawn, or till their own brief day of mortal life is finished. Honest men cannot subscribe to articles, or repeat creeds, or pray prayers which do violence to their serious convictions. To our thought the physical and spiritual universe have both been reconstructed since the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* were framed; and the Churches must either find truer and larger symbols to match this new and diviner universe, or be content to see the number con-

stantly increasing of "those who are without." To make free with solemn obligations is not the same as to be freed from them. Reforming from within is always difficult work, and it may become morally dangerous. To seek to remove evils by lending to them in the meantime the support of one's own practice and influence: to make insincere professions in the hope that one day such professions will not be required: is not a policy which can be fairly described as wise and good. We must have read ecclesiastical history in a superficial way if we fail to see that the alteration or improvement here and there of a rule of things originally meant to be fixed and final is not the key to the great steps of religious progress; and that the best cannot be reasonably expected even from the most earnest endeavours of catholic-minded men who are living under constitutions and regulations which are opposed to the whole spirit of their work, and are continually involving them in strange contradictions and inconsistencies. The best men trained in

our English and Scottish universities are turning away from the ministry of all the Churches because they cannot take a position which implies open and public assent to creeds or articles of creeds which do not have their innermost assent. They are not willing to act a lie in order to get or keep a place as religious teachers in any community. A stricter intellectual morality than has hitherto prevailed is also preventing many from joining churches as lay-members, and from habitually attending services which suppose a tacit consent to the creeds or theological principles upon which such services are founded. Nonconformity may therefore well be from time to time a necessity and condition of intellectual and spiritual veracity, due, not to self-assertion, but to the thoroughness and completeness of self-surrender to the spirit of truth. Loyalty to the coming Church, the Church of to-morrow, may also make it imperative to break with the Churches of yesterday and to-day. The new life and light,

obedience to the heavenly vision, may demand the separation and the sacrifice. Again may be heard sounding the word of the Master of Eternal Life: "Let the dead bury their dead; follow thou me."

"Here is the true thing to do;
Let Heaven see to the rest."

In the historic development of the Christian religion, it may be doubted whether any of the many Churches into which Christendom is divided exists, or has existed, for nothing. Each one has, or has had, its specific and peculiar service to render, and its own special contribution to make to faith and life, the loss of which would leave all the rest poorer.

The tendency, therefore, to minify as to magnify the differences which separate the Churches, is one to be deprecated. If the differences are no longer real and important, there is neither cause nor reason for continued separation: separation has now become schism. Churches, if they are living Churches, must inevitably grow into sympathy, and the dis-

tance between them become a diminishing quantity as they learn to hold their different forms of faith and worship more largely and vitally. We ought not, of course, to hurry changes, nor seek to shorten even converging lines, if they are the lines of a true development. Wider sympathies and relations are desirable, but not at the expense of truth and integrity. We must come to them in open and honest ways, and not by the ways of diplomacy and compromise, by surrenders of conviction and conspiracies of silence. While each Church ought to cultivate large and generous sympathies with all other Churches, and do its own special work for the sake of the whole, no Church is called to unmake or destroy itself, but only to seek to know more and more its own providential place and mission in Christendom, that it may be a faithful steward of the trust reposed in it, and be joyfully ready when its work is accomplished to abandon protests and dissents, to give up its separate exist-

ence, and lose itself in the Universal Church of God.

To find, then, the true Church of Christ we must pursue the ideal more than the historic track. It is foolish to say Lo! here; or Lo! there; Lo! here is the true Church, because here and nowhere else is the true order: or, Lo! there, because there and nowhere else is the true doctrine. Let the time past suffice for the discussion of these conflicting pretensions. Let us not be dreamers of dead dreams. The light is not all in one place, nor is the darkness. The claim of a part to be the whole is of the essence of sectarianism. Although in separating lines one may recognise the signs of a providential purpose, and not alone the work of human error and passion, yet there is little beauty in them and less truth when we regard them as enclosing the city of God, and permit them to contract and confine our sympathies, and to judge men and communities of men by artificial standards. He is indeed the true schismatic who seeks to define and divide the

flock of Christ by any formal line. To trace the presence of the One, Holy, and Catholic Church of Christ during the last nineteen centuries is no pedant's task, but a work that calls for fine spiritual sympathy and insight. It is ideal, as all the greatest things are ideal—Truth, Beauty, Love, the Home, the State. Not anywhere, nor at any time, has the human ideal come up to the Divine ideal. "The Lord's body" refuses to be identified with any visible organisation or aggregate of organisations, although something of it may be discerned in them all. The Church of Christ is no more in our day than it was in the days of Paul, or Augustine, or Luther, an outward institution; it is still an ideal which has never yet been even adequately realised. Illusion has played a great part here as in every sphere of human interest and progress. "Is that Jerusalem?" the little children of the Crusaders were accustomed to ask as hamlet after hamlet appeared in sight along their weary march. In like manner have serious men looked on every new

reformation as the final stage and form of the ecclesiastical development of Christianity,—as the New Jerusalem of their hopes, and dreams, and prayers. But what was expected to be the end turned out to be only a new beginning. The Holy City we seek is still a vision, still a prophecy, still a spirit and life, not an outward and organised existence in the world. The striving to shape the worshipping community after the heavenly pattern has in all ages been the supreme struggle of the inner and best life of Christendom, and out of the difference between idea and form, vision and achievement, has sprung the deepest sorrow and shame of Christian society—the sorrow of the aspiring soul magnified, the shame which comes from a keen sense of the immense contrast between what is and what ought to be.

Plato said of his republic, despairing of ever seeing its idea realised upon this earth —“ But, perhaps, it remaineth for us in the heavens.” Must we say the same of the Catholic Church of Christ? It has yet to

be seen, but it is inevitable. It is not anything that can be made, an artificial construction, a holy mechanical arrangement; it must grow, and grow out of the Churches of to-day as the Churches of to-day have grown out of the Churches of yesterday. And what comes by the way of growth must come with a slowness that is painful to men the days of whose years are threescore and ten. "But lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest!" Organised Christianity is on the eve of a reformation more extensive, more profound and spiritual, than that of the sixteenth century. What the best minds have seen to be true these many days is beginning to dawn upon the common intelligence of the Christian portion of mankind. Members of different religious communions are drawing together and feeling as never before that they are no longer strangers and exiles, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. We are within sight of the end of

all kinds of denominationalism. It is getting to be more and more difficult to "run" a denominational paper. The questions and outlooks are larger. Many voices everywhere may be heard calling for a Church, simply Christian, large enough to give honest welcome to all disciples of Jesus Christ. An edict of comprehension has gone forth. A Catholic Christian Church was perhaps never possible until now. The strivings and strifes of the Christian centuries, their inadequate conceptions, their partial theories, their unsuccessful experiments, their defeated plans, their broken hopes, have prepared a way for it. It is the inner church in almost every church—the Church militant in almost every denomination of Christians, and on its way to be the Church triumphant. It is the coming Church—coming not so much by the way of catastrophe and revolution as by the diviner way of growth and evolution: coming in the dreams of solitary prophets which reveal the thoughts of many hearts; coming in the aspirations

and aims of thousands of Christian souls dissatisfied with traditional forms, and seeking truer and larger statements of doctrine, and truer and larger ways of worship; coming with all the great forces of the modern world as its heralds and allies; coming in the breaking down of venerable prejudice and of the more or less petty distinctions upon which sects in the past were formed; coming in the lessening importance which is being attached to uniformity of organisation, ritual, belief, and experience, and in the growing disposition to emphasise the primary agreements rather than the secondary differences; coming in the widening recognition of and growing confidence in the truest and deepest of all unities—the unity of spiritual affection and sentiment, purpose and endeavour, the unity of the Spirit which is the bond of peace.

We are realising as never before that the Christian religion seeks to bring men together and to make of them a Church, by the stress it lays upon the inner life, upon disposition,

desire, and purpose ; upon a certain spiritual attitude toward God and man and life, and a corresponding direction of practical effort ; upon the will to do the will of God as it has been revealed to us men and for our salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not a rite or a creed that is central in Christianity, but a certain kind or quality of life, the life which we seek to describe by such terms as “ filial,” “ Spiritual,” “ Divine,” “ Eternal,” — the life which Jesus lived, and which He came to quicken and impart. The Church of Christ gathers about the life hid with Christ in God, and it exists to nourish and strengthen that life in its own members, and to make it more and more of a reality and influence in the world. The one essential condition, then, of admission to the communion of Christ is faith in or sympathy with Christ’s way of life—faith, it may be, only as a grain of mustard seed, yet sufficient to make one learn of Christ and to strive to be what He was and to do what He did. It is this faith which makes a man in idea

a Christian man, and therefore a member of the Church of Christ; and to set up any other standard, to insist on and make essential any other condition, is, in the eyes of the Master, whatever it may be in our own, the only real heresy and schism. As Coleridge put it many years ago: "In the strictest sense of essential this alone is essential, that the same spirit should be growing in us which was in the fulness of all perfection in Jesus Christ." St Paul expressed the same idea in a sentence which sectarian Christians do not seem to be aware that he ever wrote: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." In this matter of religious fellowship we must not put Christ out of the way, but make Him the Way—His way our way. A Church is quite different from a purely voluntary association, which has a perfect right to lay down its own conditions of membership and make any rules it pleases for its own government. A religious society assuming the name of a Church of Christ must act in consistency with

the principles of Christ, have no other conditions of communion than those He laid down for discipleship, and be governed in all matters by His law and Spirit, and not by the partialities and predilections of majorities.¹ The first duty of a Christian Church is to be Christian—not Roman Catholic or Protestant, Calvinistic or Arminian, Trinitarian or Unitarian, Episcopalian or Presbyterian—but simply Christian. It is an evasion to say that we are to be Christian under the mode or form of a particular ecclesiastical body or sect. That changes the emphasis entirely, and as practically carried out it means being Christian so far only as the special objects, views, aims, or success of a denomination will allow. Loyalty

¹ “The Church is one, not as consisting of one society, but because the various societies or churches were first modelled, and ought still to be so, on the same principles on which Christians in all ages might form societies for themselves.”—*Kingdom of Christ*, by Archbishop Whately.

“It would be strange if the Church should require more than Christ Himself did. What charter hath Christ given to the Church to bind men up to more than Himself hath done?”—Bishop Stillingfleet’s *Irenicum*.

to a denomination is too often insisted upon to some obscuring or hindering of the higher loyalty—the only loyalty that ought to be named among those who profess and call themselves Christians. On the foundation of the Church of Christ in its catholicity and in its unity all our organised religious life and activity ought to rest. We sing in one of our hymns about standing up for Jesus, but to “stand up for Jesus,” I beg you to remember, means to be loyal to His ideals and methods, His principles, purposes, and Spirit. “Why call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not the things which I say?”

III

A PLEA FOR A FULLER AND MORE PERFECT REALISATION OF THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE ideal of a Church large enough and broad enough to welcome and receive all sincere disciples of Christ has been given us not merely to gaze at and exclaim, "Oh, it is beautiful!" but that we may obey its beauty and put into practical shape what we see and admire. It is not an impossible but a practicable ideal, and ought to be imperative over all our hesitancies and over every individual or associated preference. We must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision, nor slow any longer to put on the largeness and catholicity of Christ. To conform our

religious communities, their organisation and order, their worship and work, their faith and life, to the ideal of Christ, this ought to be and must be our constant aspiration and endeavour.

1. A genuine catholic Christian Church—a Church which in its terms of communion is as comprehensive as the Christian life—must have for its basis of union, not uniformity of order and ritual, submission to external regulation and ceremony, but mutual spiritual sympathy, aspiration, and purpose. It will have room in it for the man aspiring after Christian excellence who has been baptized by sprinkling or immersion, or who has not been baptized at all, either in infancy or in age; for the man with “High” or “Low” theories of the Supper of the Lord; and for the Friend filled with the Spirit who regards the sacraments as not helps but hindrances to spiritual communion, and does not care therefore to observe them. Religion has ever sought symbolical expression, and requires it,

but we must not put symbols and signs before and above the realities which they represent, nor make of means and helps indispensable conditions and tests. It is not by participation in any ceremonial act or ordinance we are made Christians. To Jesus Christ no ritual was essential. The one essential baptism is not of water but of the Spirit, and the one essential communion, not the partaking of bread and wine, but the participation and assimilation of the Spirit of Christ. It is "with one spirit" we are baptized into the one body; and we "feed on Christ" when we participate in the filial and Divine life which quickened the beloved Son of God. Although I believe with all my heart and mind in the principle and need of form, in the sacred ritual of historic Christianity and its high place and value in the organisation and order of associated Christian life,¹ yet the thing signified is of much more importance

¹ See the writer's *Plea for a Worshipful Church*, J. M. Dent & Co., 1903.

than the symbol, and, as the words of Jesus and the experience of Christian men clearly show, is attainable without it. It was to obedience and prayer, to disposition and character, Jesus said the highest blessings were attached, and that not in any arbitrary but in a purely simple and natural way—like to like. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” “He that willeth to do the will, shall know the teaching.” What can the observance of baptism, of Holy Communion, and of confirmation and ordination rites supply, which cannot be obtained in the way indicated by these great sayings—which give expression, not to arbitrary decrees, but to laws rooted in the nature of things? It is plain that ecclesiastical organisations and orders do not and cannot limit any of the gracious gifts of God. All around us we may see the Eternal Wisdom and Goodness making saints and prophets of those who only care for purity of heart,

not for baptism of water: for spiritual intimacy with Christ, not for bread and wine. Disciples and friends of Jesus they are, but their Christianity is that of the spirit, not that of the letter; priests they are in the Church of Christ, but their priesthood is that of inspiration and character—a priesthood not after the order of Levi, but after that of Melchizedek, which abideth for ever. Many are the pathways of the Spirit of God, known and unknown, and our religion is so all-sided and inclusive that it leaves no faithful soul without some measure of its consolation.

It is easy, of course, to swing away from superstition and formality to a barren extreme. It is, no doubt, wiser and better to take up the truth which gives vitality and attractiveness to superstition and error into a larger thought and life. Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for sacrificing the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith, to minor duties and details; but He did not blame them for tithing mint, anise, and cummin.

“These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone.” He who knew what is in man knew the constant interaction there is between the inner and outer life, between spirit and form, sentiment and deed. The genius of His religion is just this sublime comprehensiveness which rejects not one element which is necessary or helpful to complete life. Let us be wise with the wisdom of Christ. Instead of imposing the sacraments upon those to whom they may not have at present any very real significance, let us receive all such persons as the Lord has received them, and then seek to quicken and nourish in them the life which finds natural expression in the symbols and services of our Christian worship, and is able to transmute the material into the spiritual, and to receive spiritual nourishment in and through material things.¹

¹ “Both baptism and the communion are ancient and interesting ceremonies, but the Christian life is perfectly possible without them. It is by no means certain that Jesus intended the rite (the Eucharist) to be repeated.

There is a small but increasing number of people who think that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper has become so deeply embedded in superstition that the time has arrived for treating it as Hezekiah treated the brazen serpent of Moses: "*Nehushtan*, a thing of brass." And yet there are simple conceptions of it which can make the influence of this much perverted rite as healthful as are the gracious hospitalities of social life, investing it with a significance that is unspeakably sacred and helpful, and raising its hallowed symbols into real aids to the Divine friendship and communion of which they

Jülicher argues very ably for the primitiveness of the account in St Mark's Gospel, which does not prescribe repetition. But however that may be, we are not slaves of the letter of Christ's words. To suppose that He made the rite of eating and drinking an essential condition is impossible when one considers the purely spiritual and ethical character of His teaching. I would claim, then, the liberty of abstaining from the communion rite, and yet remaining a member of the Church of England. A rite that has been of great spiritual benefit in early ages may, after it has been quarrelled over, become an actual hindrance."—Anglican Clergyman in *Church Gazette*.

speaking. In the same way, infant baptism may be so filled with meaning that it may become a public and impressive recognition of the Fatherhood of God, the divinity of the parental relation, and the sanctity of childhood. Let us not put aside and neglect any ancient service or form which we can purify and fill with truer and finer meaning. On the other hand, let us not be ever repeating in new forms the error of the Jewish Christians, as if circumcision or uncircumcision were the bond of union, and not faith working by love. Why continue to let the unity of the spirit pass practically for nothing without the visible symbols of agreement? Why, for instance, make of a mode of baptism a barrier to Christian fellowship, and a ground for forming and keeping up a separate denomination? Let every Church make provision for baptism in both ways, and for infant dedication without water. Why should the Episcopal Church worship and legislate as a rule (as one of its own bishops once remarked) as

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if there were no other body of Christians in existence, and it alone the one Christian Church in the land?¹ The High Church temper is obviously not a catholic temper. Crying out against schism and dissent, it is itself schismatic and dissenting. It seeks to divide the body of Christ by a ritual line, and is so entangled in the machinery of religion that it appears to question and deny the possibility of personal and direct approach, unmediated by any priest or form, of the individual soul to God, spirit to Spirit, child to Father. The viciousness of its plea is made manifest by this externalisation of religion and the Church. It requires to put to itself the admonitory

¹ "The theory of the Church of England is an aristocratic theory. The way it works in society proves what I say. It has systematised exclusion and supported caste in religion. It has forced the whole body of Dissenters from its forms to suffer under a religious and a social stigma. Its standard of the worthiest is not spiritual goodness but union with itself: this is not the fault of its members but the fault of its theory, which is too strong for them; but the fault utterly condemns the theory."—*From Reasons for Secession from the Church of England*, by the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke.

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questions which St Paul, who clung with the whole energy of his great heart to a deep spiritual unity, asked of Galatian and Corinthian Christians absorbed in small problems about accessories, accidentals and incidentals: "Having begun in the spirit, are ye now to be perfected in the flesh? Is Christ divided? Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trusts to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's so are we Christ's." "Receive ye one another, as Christ also has received you." But we have not so learned Christ. We are constantly giving to secondary and subordinate things a place and an importance which they have not and cannot have in a religion that is essentially a ministration of the spirit; and constantly forgetting that the Church of Christ, like the kingdom of God, is not meat and drink, ceremony and organisation, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and that whatever external forms the

divine life in men may assume must be largely matters of choice, circumstance, and convenience.

2. A catholic Christian Church will have for its basis and bond of union identity of sympathy, aspiration and purpose—not views and opinions. It is not that views and opinions are unimportant, but that they are, as George Eliot once said, “a poor cement of human souls,” and an inadequate measure of spiritual affinities. To have clear ideas about religion, as about other things, is most desirable. But clear ideas about what?—about a variety of matters, speculative, historical, critical, evidential, which are not vital to the Christian life, are not open to spiritual verification, but must by their own nature ever remain more or less uncertain? Religion and theology are no doubt inseparable, but a Church truly catholic must lay the emphasis on religion,—religion before theology. So long as the limits of our Churches are views about the Bible and inspiration, about the in-

terior relations of the Godhead, predestination, miracles, the future discipline of souls and such like matters, our Churches are sectarian, not catholic, and are bound to exclude from their communion all those persons who do not share their views. And these limits, remember, press most keenly—not on the weak and ignorant, but on the most thoughtful, sensitive, and serious spirits. Men who are of one mind on these high and hard matters are so, as a rule, because they are of no mind. They have not thought enough about them to have differences, not even to be aware of difficulties. Why should ecclesiastical communities pay so much regard to the unenlightened and unthoughtful—virtually constituting them the arbiters of belief; and be so unsympathetic, or even hostile, towards those whose only fault it is that they are seeking to add to their faith, knowledge? The “weak brethren” ought to have all proper consideration shown towards them, but there is constant danger, through exaggerated

and perverted sentiment, of so yielding to them as to make them masters of the situation. The Churches at this moment are busy on all sides, crying "Come!" to the halt and the blind, while on the other hand they are virtually denying rights of sanctuary to many true disciples of Christ who cannot stunt their minds and stultify their moral natures sufficiently to comply with terms of fellowship which are an addition to the simple Christian allegiance. We do not honour the Saviour of men by seeking to make Him the head of exclusive organisations.¹ The note of a true Christ's Church is inclusion, not exclusion. It has room for the man of little faith and the man of much faith, for believers weak and strong, ignorant and

¹ "Exclusiveness and its practice seems to me to be at the root of nearly half the evils which have connected themselves with religion. . . . It denies, in my mind, the mighty conception which Christ gave to the world of an universal Fatherhood in God, of an universal brotherhood among men, of an universal Church which embraces all the race, which now exists in idea, but which will be completed in fact in the future."—*Stopford A. Brooke.*

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enlightened. I cannot conceive of a theological affirmation or negation, an orthodoxy or a heresy, which should exclude any genuine disciple of Christ from a Church simply Christian. Why should the bond which unites a man to Christ be insufficient to bind him to his fellow-Christians? A Church is indeed not a Church, but a club or a sect, when it excludes those whom Christ would receive. Do you think the Master whom we serve would exclude (were He here) from His communion any man because of his speculative uncertainties, because he thinks this or that Bible story to be unhistorical, legendary, poetic, or because he cannot believe the miracles, the virgin birth and the physical resurrection; *or* any man whose questions and doubts are born, not of arrogance, but of honesty and humility of thought, and who hesitates to speak with certainty where certainty is impossible? It is foolish, almost wicked, to seek to entangle inextricably the great Christian trusts and hopes with theo-

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logical propositions or events of doubtful authenticity, or to do anything to unchurch any man who humbly and earnestly calls himself by the name of Christ, and is striving to depart from iniquity. The supreme thing ought ever to be, not what men believe about this or that disputed doctrine, or this or that thing which may have happened, or may not have happened, about two thousand years ago, but what they love and trust, hope and pray, live and work for. In these passing days God appears to hide things from the eyes of many of His most faithful children as part of the necessary discipline of their life, and there is all the more need, therefore, that such men should not be exiles from the places whose associations and atmosphere most conduce to reverent and exalted feeling and thought. The essence of all genuine comprehension as it affects individuals is that each man should have room to be himself—his true, reasonable and Christian self, and not be compelled to sacrifice his mental integrity and practise

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dishonesty in order to preserve unbroken dear and sacred ties. To impose creeds upon our Churches which shut out by their intellectual limitations any of those whom the Master, if He were among us to-day, would call not servants but friends, is to divide Christ. The unity of the faith is not unity of belief. It is an old saying and a true one—"All good men agree far more than they differ." They who only see the surface may see differences, but those who are able to pierce deeper see the underlying unities—identity of spiritual sentiment and conviction, notwithstanding diversity of intellectual view and statement. We need to keep a practical, working faith in the essential Christian things distinct from definition, theory, and questions of history, philosophy, and literature. The man who sees God in Christ, for example, whatever may be his views concerning the supposed physical accompaniments of the Divine manifestation, belongs through that great persuasion to the communion of the Church of

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Christ.¹ To a man so mastered by Jesus Christ as to call Him "Lord" and "Saviour" one need not put questions, but only pray to his Father and our Father that by doing the will the things of God may become for him and for us more and more clear, significant, and helpful, no longer half-believed wonders, but things we deeply know and realise. The Church of Christ cannot be defined and limited by a theological any more than by a ceremonial line. It is in God and not in opinions about God, in Christ and not in opinions about Christ, we come together. What gives the feeling of communion and deepens it, is not being able to agree to the same views, to repeat the same creeds, to use

¹ "Men had all things in common and were all of one mind when there were no creeds and no New Testament but only the affirmation, 'Have we not seen the Lord Jesus Christ?'—which did not mean merely beholding with the eye, but recognising with the understanding the revelation of God in Christ, the revelation of that which God is to man and that which God desires in man. When shall we get back again to that simple condition of belief?"
—*Dr Alexander Ewing*, late Bishop of Argyll and the Isles.

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the same words and phrases in psalm and prayer. It is possible to be at one with each other in these outward tests, and yet to be wholly divided in temper and habit of life. It is the subtle sympathy of congenial souls, it is the unity of the spirit, that is the real bond—the bond of peace. In our supreme moments of religious communion we cease to be sectarian, cease to be Roman Catholics or Protestants, Conformists or Nonconformists, Calvinists or Arminians, Trinitarians or Unitarians—cease to be anything partial; it is given us to realise our oneness with God and with the whole Church and family of God, to verify in our experience what Dr Arnold of Rugby called “the very truth of truths, that Christian unity and the perfection of Christ’s Church are independent of theological articles of opinion, consisting in a certain moral and spiritual state, and in certain moral and religious affections.”

The whole idea of the Church as an opinionative fellowship, an association of people hold-

ing the same theological views, is a sadly mistaken one, and has proved itself to be so times and ways without number. Doctrine-worship has been as mischievous as sacrament-worship. It has turned the attention and interest of men away from the one vital and essential thing, namely, obedience to the will of God, and made them strangely forgetful of the one heresy that is deadly, namely, wickedness of life. The Church of Christ is not one of theologians and critics, but of disciples. Progress toward that ideal means progress in charity and sympathy, and larger and lovelier forms of brotherhood. That which is truly catholic or universal must necessarily cover much theological difference and variety. Wide diversities of opinion need not be a reproach to any worshipping community if they rest on an open and honest foundation. It should be the glory of a Church that its confession of faith is so simple and the words of its prayers so undogmatic and large, that it can

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honestly include many different types of thought. "Identity of sentiment with difference of opinion," John Sterling regarded as requisite to pleasant company, and they are still more requisite to religious fellowship, and to a Church's health and progress.

"Difference is the soul of life and love,
And not the barren oneness weak souls crave.
Rest springs from strife, and dissonant chords beget
Divinest harmonies."

3. A catholic Christian Church will have for its basis and bond of union identity of sympathy, aspiration, and purpose—not sameness of religious experience. The spiritual life of man is an infinitely varied thing. The ways by which men are brought to God are as many as the methods of the Divine approach to man. When I read the biographies of good men, or listen to the expression given by different minds of their experience of religion, I am reminded of the sacred writer's vision of the New Jerusalem, which describes the pilgrims to the city of God as entering through twelve

gates. In the old Church it was and is generally believed that it is through sacramental methods alone the soul can reach its God and find the healing grace of Christ. The Episcopal Church requires no special individual experience as a condition or indication of fitness for Holy Communion, but lays most stress on the natural growth and culture of Christian character and on the Supper of the Lord as an aid to, rather than as a test of, the good life. In the Presbyterian Churches theological knowledge and soundness, acquaintance with and acquiescence in catechism and confession have, or have had, such prominence given to them as to create and make prevalent the impression that the experience of the divine life is inseparable from belief in Calvinistic doctrine. In the Churches which have derived their life from a Puritan ancestry, there used to be little place save for a clear and pronounced religious experience, little place for the youth growing in grace and wisdom but with no deep sense of his sinfulness, the

beginning of whose spiritual life was not conscious and at a date that could be fixed ; little place for men and women whose religion was more moral and practical than mystical, and not able or willing to render any definite account of itself. By a large school of present-day religionists we are told that “they are falsely called Christian to whom the direct communication of the soul with the Saviour is not a conscious reality.” My reading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ would lead me rather to emphasise the personal consciousness or realisation of sonship to God, and not the direct communication of the soul with the Saviour, as the distinctively Christian experience.¹ But when men are lifted into accord with God, by whatsoever means, and find their joy in doing His will, we need not be too anxious to criticise methods and instrumentalities. At all events they have reached the

¹ “The source of the Christian religion is the experience of Jesus, and a man is a Christian just to the degree in which he experiences the filial piety of Jesus.”—*Auguste Sabatier*.

end. They have found and been found of God, and are at rest in Him. The method of the past did not lay sufficient stress upon the dissimilarities of religious experience. It is good that we are coming to see that the ways are many and past finding out unto perfection by which God brings men into filial intimacy with Himself—that is, into the fellowship of Christ, the perfect and beloved Son of God. What we may call a change of spiritual atmosphere has taken place in Christendom, and old things are passing away and all things are being made new. We expect and welcome dissimilarities in experimental religion. We are ceasing to regard as spiritual reprobates those who cannot express the reality of their religious experience in the same traditional forms and phrases. We are looking beneath names and words, and behind differences of method and experience, and are discovering allies and brethren of the Spirit where before we only saw aliens and strangers. And this is the basis of genuine liberality in

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religion, not the absence of conviction, or laxity of personal belief, or empty sentiment, or lazy indifference, but the recognition of the same controlling aspirations, ideals, and aims—

“That all paths to the Father lead
When self the feet have spurned.”

The comprehensive Church for which I plead has room in it for all types and forms of the Christian life, emotional, mystical, rational, moral, practical; it is so simply Christian that children who are learning to say in spirit and in truth, “Father, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,” may belong to it, and men representing different kinds of religious temperament and experience. All aspiring and striving souls are of one fellowship—the true Church catholic, the Church not of man but of God; and though we may not hear Him, the Good Shepherd calleth them all by name.

4. A catholic Christian Church will have for its basis and bond of union, aspiration, not attainment; purpose, not character. It is often said that the Church ought to have for its

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members only men and women of Christian character, but my contention is that it is for all those who are seeking and striving after Christian character. Character is not the condition and beginning of its fellowship, but its product and end. It is content with nothing less than perfection, yet it bears with much imperfection. A Church that makes character the condition and test of fellowship is of about as much use as a school that makes learning the condition and test of entrance. The supreme object of the Church is the discipline and culture of character, to make Christians, not to find them; and to found it on character already attained is to take from it its distinctive function and mission. The Church of Christ is for all aspiring and struggling souls, and not only for choice and select Christians; it is pre-eminently a Church of disciples, not a Church of finished scholars and saints. A Church of professed saints could only be a body of self-deceived or hypocritical people. The world in the worst sense, and all the little-

nesses and meannesses of life, are found as a rule in the religious societies that boast of the purity of their fellowship, and whose prevailing spirit is "Stand apart, we are holier than thou," "the temple of the Lord are we." I have always had more sympathy with the Roman and Anglican idea of the Church as a training place for young and old in the Christian life than with the Puritan theory of a sacred inner community—composed of people separated by a broad line of demarcation, not only from the world, but from fellow-worshippers. The line which divides church and congregation is no real and honest line ; it divides Christ Himself, and secures, after all, but a very imperfect Church, which often quickly becomes a very corrupt Church. It is not possible, even if it were desirable, to draw lines of spiritual separation between men. It is gradation, not unrelatedness, which we see everywhere. There is much of the sinner in the saint, and much of the saint in the sinner, and it is the truest and best saints who are always

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most deeply aware how near they are to the worst sinners. We are also bidden, "Judge not." It is the declaratory and not the inquisitorial method which the wise Christian minister will follow in his dealings with those who, drawn by the promptings of the spirit within them, seek to join the company of Christian disciples. Beyond declaring the Church to be a Christian institution, he will be careful not to exclude any but notorious and unrepenting evildoers. The Church, I repeat, is not for saints—not, at least, for those who think themselves to be saints—but for people who are "called to be saints" and are seeking to be saints. It is, on the other hand, not for sinners who love their sins and are contented to be what they are, but for sinners who hate their sins, and are praying and striving to escape from their dominion. Jesus Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, and in those who wanted to join His company He sought, not attainment, but the desire to attain; not complete obedience,

but the purpose to obey. He is altogether concerned about character, and so is His Church, but as the end of faith, not the beginning; as the last, and not the first thing in the Christian obedience. We seek to enter His Church and to put ourselves within the circle of its holy and helpful influences, not because we feel ourselves to be so much better than the people around us, but because we are dissatisfied with ourselves, and are seeking to be what we are called to be and to do what we are called to do. Enough it is if the face and feet are set in the right direction; enough if we are disciplined unto Christ and wish to learn of Him; enough if we have the will to do the will of His Father and our Father.

5. A church comprehensive and catholic in its terms of communion will seek to make the worship which is the manifestation of that communion comprehensive and catholic—as widely adaptable as is possible to the needs of men, both individually and collectively. It will seek to meet and satisfy in and

through its services of worship, many and varied wants and sympathies and tastes; and appeal in turn to every side of human nature, and to every form and degree of spiritual life. It will have cast out the fear that the use of solemn, beautiful, and impressive forms and symbols must be unfriendly to the spirit of Christian worship. It will have in its hymns and prayers as little as possible of what divides Christian men.¹ It will not care to recite creeds and read prayers which are bound up with an outgrown theology, and

¹ "Though there are many different forms of religion among them" (the Utopians), "yet all these agree in the main point, which is the worshipping of the Divine Essence; and therefore there is nothing to be seen or heard in their temples in which the several persuasions among them may not agree; for every sect performs those rites that are peculiar to it in their own private houses, nor is there anything in the public worship that contradicts the particular ways of those different sects. Nor are there any prayers among them but such as every one of them may use without prejudice to his own opinion . . . and these are so composed that whatsoever is pronounced by the whole Assembly may be likewise applied by every man to his own condition."—*Utopia*, by Sir Thomas More.

"Worship must unite, not divide men."—*Matthew Arnold*.

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which can only be kept in use by the exercise of ingenuity in devising forced private interpretations which may at times involve a public falsehood. It is impossible for thoughtful and honest men living at the beginning of the twentieth century to think and speak concerning the things of God as wise and good men thought and spoke in the fifth and sixth, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And a Church which only belongs to those who can repeat creeds and phrases that have descended from a distant past, cannot be truthfully called a catholic Christian Church. We must have simpler forms of prayer and praise. The virtue of veracity ought not to shut out any disciple of Christ from the public worship of the God of Truth. The words one is required to repeat may be venerable and sacred, but age and association do not make them true. The present has its claims as well as the past. It strikes at the root of sincere worship, and threatens to turn the Church into a school

of intellectual dishonesty, to be obliged to use words that are ambiguous and obsolete, and to have to think of mental suppressions and evasions in the presence of God. But if prayers and canticles and hymns were what they ought to be in language and sentiment, there is no reason why devout persons holding very different opinions might not join without mental reservations in the worship of the Church. To preserve and use what is simplest and best in the devotional treasures which have come down from the past, and at the same time to give free expression to the religious aspirations and affections which belong to the time that now is—this is the problem which the coming Church will solve. In its worship spirit and truth, order and freedom, will blend.

6. The catholic Christian Church for which I plead must have a catholic Christianity to preach, a message as large as the Gospel of Jesus Christ, glad tidings for all people. What has been said of the Christian poet

ought to be true of the Christian preacher—that believing men everywhere can claim him as their own. He will regard it as his calling to deal with those universal elements to which all Christian hearts and minds can respond, and this not because he is moved by a desire not to offend, but from a clear and ardent purpose to utter that deeper and larger word which is believed by each, because believed by all to whom Jesus Christ is Way and Truth. He will seek to hold and preach his Christianity, not as a problem, but as an open secret; not as a theme for critical research, but as a Divine message; not as a discovery, but as a revelation; not as a philosophy, but as a gospel; not as a creed, but as a faith. To nourish the temper of faith in men is the supreme function and end of his ministry. Men, he knows, live by faith, not by questioning and debate; and the pulpit, he is persuaded, exists more for inspiration than information, not to discuss what is and what must always be more or less doubtful, but to make and keep clear what is central

in religion and certain. "Speak to me of necessary truths," said the great French preacher Bossuet on his deathbed; and it is the necessary truths which the minister of the Church Universal has most joy in declaring, and which he seeks to make real and commanding to those who come under his influence. It may be his duty, of course, from time to time to clear away hindrances to the acceptance of these necessary truths that faith in them may be more intelligent and pure; his duty, for the sake of those who are disturbed by the doubts which the intellectual life of this age has bred, to deal publicly with questions concerning the literature, history, and philosophy of religion, and to say concerning them the inmost thing he thinks and the deepest thing he feels. And this also he may be moved to do, not only for the sake of others, but for his own self-respect, and to win and strengthen confidence in himself as a religious teacher. Intellectual honesty is to the preacher what commercial honesty is

to the merchant. The persistent evading of serious problems in the pulpit—though it may often be due to good feeling and motive—is not a manly course to pursue. The tendency to obscure and hide in emotional mists all those disturbing intellectual aspects of the religious situation which are so evident not only to the scholar but to every reading man, is as mischievous as is the tendency to make them too prominent, and to identify them with the essence of religion. It is, on the other hand, just as bad to be for ever discussing questions concerning the philosophy and history of Christianity (as if our religion were essentially a problem and not a way of life) as it is to shun them altogether. We must think and shape our thoughts into order and form; and if we only think long enough and deeply enough we may come to think substantially alike on the great things of God. Our intellectual and spiritual life cannot always be at strife. There is and must be a unity of thought and faith as well as a unity of spirit,

and God can be loved with the mind as well as with the heart and soul. But the purely intellectual aspects of religion, what we call "theology," "christology," "philosophy," "criticism," are more for school and class than for the church; more for lecture and lesson than for the sermon, which ought as a rule to blend without jarring note with the sanctities of prayer and praise. It is not so much the science of things which we want in the house of God as the things themselves, the deep things of the spirit; a glimpse of the heavens and the stars, not an astronomy; flowers from the celestial gardens in all their beauty and fragrance, not a vegetable physiology. While true simplicity is not shallowness, and a simple faith not an ignorant faith; and experience and culture are both required for the clearest discernment and finest appreciation of the simplest elements of religion; and deep and delicate questions are involved in and suggested by the plainest things: nevertheless there is much truth in what Ruskin once said, that anything

in Christianity which cannot be taught to a child is not essential to it. One need not depreciate the importance of theological and critical studies to sympathise with the observation of an intelligent man who, when looking through the volumes of Dr. Lardner's great work on the credibility of Christianity, exclaimed, "It surely must be a very doubtful religion which requires so much learning to prove it credible." Scholarship itself ought to be compelled to bear a part in the work of simplifying the Christian religion and of delivering it from the accretions which have gathered about it in its passage through the centuries, instead of multiplying difficulties and starting twenty new questions for every one that it settles. A divine thing can surely be known to be divine apart from those elaborate and subtle arguments which only learned men can truly appreciate.¹ We can call Jesus "Lord," said the apostle, by the Holy Spirit; that is—know Him to be our Divine Master through a

¹ "The soul divines what is Divine."—*Tertullian*.

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kindred spirit and life in ourselves. A gospel to be a Gospel is not something which we are called to puzzle over and speculate about, and which requires textual and other criticism to establish, and miraculous and other outward evidence to support it ; not something written merely in ancient books, but something that can be written on the heart ; a teaching which the obedient can know, a mercy which the merciful can receive, a vision of God which the pure can see. There is deep wisdom in the apostolic counsel which bids us add to our faith knowledge—faith coming first in order—those simple trusts and hopes which are the good news of Christ. All the great experiences of life and death ask for simple thoughts, ask for a religion which can root itself in those moral and spiritual intuitions and experiences to which the Jesus of the Galilean Gospel ever appealed, and which lowly and unlettered men can judge without any fear that their judgment can be upset by the learning of the schools.

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The Church, then, that would be truly catholic must deal in its teaching, without obscurity and double meaning, with the simple and universal elements of Christianity; and it must be able to do this unhindered by any narrowness of theory that shall oppose itself to the intellectual movement of the world. It will be a Church for those who have no desire to nurse antagonisms, and are eager to forget in all practical ways that the disciples of Christ are not a single and undivided company. Its ministry will be a ministry of reconciliation. Its preachers will stand at that point where all the Christian sects meet; large-minded, large-hearted men, anxious not to divide but to unite, to emphasise, not disagreements but the hidden and deeper unities, affirmative without being dogmatic, rational without being rationalistic, earnest without bigotry, liberal without indifference; men who have reached and proved in their own experience the central things of religion and are spending their interest

and utterance upon them, allowing all little things to drop out of sight and die of neglect.

It has been the misfortune of Christian worship and of Christian teaching as represented by the Churches that they have often been made to appear partial and incomplete, strong and rich and well developed on one side, but weak and poor and fragmentary on all other sides. Emerson, writing of the results of the division of labour, says that if we look around we see here an arm, there a foot, in one place a head, and in another a hand, but nowhere a complete man. It is the same with the ideal of the Church. One part or side of it we find represented by the Roman Catholics, other parts or sides by Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Independents, Unitarians, Quakers, Moravians, Plymouth Brethren, Swedenborgians. The true Catholic Church will seek to take into itself all the good elements, all the helpful usages and customs, which are to be found in all the Churches and sects, and seek to make them part of its own

order and life. Of those who argue for separation and division, and the exalting and magnifying of differences, it will ask : Is Christ divided ?

Now, what is the conclusion of the whole matter ? At present, little more than this. By putting before you the ideal of a Church simply Christian, I hope to put you in love with it, to deepen your confidence in it, to make you give your influence and sympathy to the movements and men who are most directly and openly preparing the way for it, and to stimulate you to do what you can for its realisation. It is an ideal worth living and working for. Though it tarry, wait for it—praying with Tauler, “ May that which is perfect come, that that which is in part may be done away.” The waiting, however, need not be passive. Even now we may belong to the catholic fellowship of Jesus Christ. In our religious sympathies we can disown every sectarian limit ; we can refuse to have anything to do with drawing lines, or keeping to lines already drawn, which the Master of Christians

never drew ; we can decline to let artificial and conventional arrangements hinder us from recognising the scattered kindred of Christ wherever they may be found ; we can treat as anti-Christ the sectarian temper of all those religious guides who bid us hold no communion with any other Church than their own ; we can turn away in the Lord's name from everything that has the mark of exclusiveness upon it as much as if it had the mark of base ambition or passion ; we can strive to make our ways of worship and teaching and work as non-exclusive and catholic as He was who said, " Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother " ; and " Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

The Church we need, I repeat, is a Church that stands for the simplicity and sufficiency of the religion of Jesus Christ, calling itself by no name but one. Every such name as Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist, Unitarian, is a derogation. Is Christ

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divided ? Nothing is gained by setting up one Church against another, and by using names to separate and distinguish men who are one in their spiritual aspirations and aims, in the reverences, loyalties, and hopes of the Christian discipleship. Denominationalism has done about all the good work it can do. It has borne its witness ; let it now fade and pass away. Calvinism and Arminianism represent extinct disputes. No thoughtful Christian man, whatever his ecclesiastical connections, any longer conceives of God in the way which made the Unitarian protest so necessary and beneficent in past days. In the recognition of the Incarnation of God in the life of Christ and in the life of Christian humanity, we are finding a faith which rises above the lines of ancient controversy and leaves room for the broadest churchmanship. The best men in all the Churches do not want to wear theological and sectarian labels. They are seeking to find a common basis of union, to come together under some large Christian confession,

and to live with one another as becometh disciples of Christ. Many of them will be devoutly thankful when even Protestantism will disappear in the glorious reality of a Church right worthy to be called "The Holy Catholic Church." That day may be far off, but we can labour and pray for its coming. The unity of the Spirit must work itself out in a body and be seen of men.

In the meantime, let us remember that to build up a Church as large as the religion of Jesus Christ we do not need great masses. Such a Church is not made by size alone. All the varied elements I have mentioned may be grouped in a single Church whose worship and teaching and work may be so ordered that every Christian soul, from devout free-thinker to Roman Catholic, may find himself drawn to it, and be by little or nothing repelled. The catholicity of the Church of Jesus may be epitomised in and represented by one worshipping community. It is, indeed, in the single congregation of

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faithful men that Christianity continually begins anew. It is the true Mother Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." And where Christ is, as Luther said, there is the Church—as truly and essentially the Church of Christ as the vast company of Christian disciples all over the world. This Church may be yours and mine. In what we do and leave undone; in what we say and leave unsaid; in our worship and teaching; in our communion and service; in all our methods and ministrations; we may make of a congregation here and a congregation there the centre and working place of a catholic Christianity—a Church for all disciples of Christ who seek for unity without asking for uniformity, not for the things which separate, but for the trusts and hopes and charities which are alone essential, and which alone abide. Thus done, your work and mine will have its place in the building of the Eternal City of God.

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